

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COTONO 01886 131448Z
ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0268
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
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AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1886

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, DM
SUBJ: FORMATION OF FIRST UNITS OF BENINESE PEOPLE'S MILITIA

1. INSTEAD OF DISPLAYING A NEW ARRAY OF SOVIET HARDWARE AS EXPECTED, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) USED THE OCCASION OF THE NOVEMBER 30 NATIONAL DAY TO SHOW OFF THE FIRST UNITS OF THE PEOPLE'S MILITIA. IN KEEPING WITH THE DAHOMEAN TRADITION OF AMAZON WARRIORS, THE SEVEN UNITS OF SIXTY MEN EACH WERE PRECEDED BY A SPECIAL DETACHMENT OF TWENTY-FIVE BENINESE WOMEN. THE MILITIA UNITS WERE DRESSED IN CUBAN-STYLE DARK GREEN UNIFORMS AND FOR THE MOST PART CARRIED OLD FRENCH RIFLES PASSED DOWN FROM THE REGULAR ARMED FORCES. (LARGE SHIPMENTS OF SOVIET SMALL ARMS AND RIFLES HAVE MADE SUCH TRANSFERS POSSIBLE.) UNLIKE THE OUT-OF-STEP MARCHERS WHO HAVE STRAGGLED BY IN PREVIOUS MILITARY REVIEWS, THE MILITIA UNITS MARCHED SMARTLY, WERE EVIDENTLY IN GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION AND SEEMED TO TESTIFY TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR TRAINING BY CUBAN MILITARY ADVISORS.

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PAGE 02 COTONO 01886 131448Z

2. COMMENT: THE CREATION OF THE POPULAR MILITIA MARKS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN THE ENTRENCHMENT OF THE BENINESE REVOLUTION. SINCE THE KEREKOU REGIME DECLARED ITS MARXIST-LENINIST OPTION IN 1974, ITS EFFORTS TO CREATE A SINGLE-PARTY STATE WITH THE USUAL "REVOLUTIONARY" STRUCTURES HAVE MET WITH FRUSTRATION OUTSIDE OF THE MAJOR URBAN CENTERS OF COTONOU AND PORTO-NOVO. ALTHOUGH EVERY DISTRICT THROUGHOUT BENIN HAS ITS COMMITTEE FOR

THE DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION (CDR), IN A MAJORITY OF INSTANCES
THE RURAL MEMBERS DO LITTLE MORE THAN CHANT SLOGANS AND PAY LIP
SERVICE TO THE ENDLESS STREAM OF REVOLUTIONARY DECREES EMANATING
FROM THE PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN COTONOU. WITH THE ADVENT
OF THE PEOPLE'S MILITIA UNDER THE DIRECT CONTROL OF THE PARTY,
HOWEVER, THE GPRB HAS A POTENTIALLY EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT FOR
MAKING THE MAINLY RHETORICAL REVOLUTION A REALITY. ASSUMING
THAT TRAINING OF THE MILITIA CONTINUES AT THE SAME OR EVEN A
FASTER RATE, AND THAT THE KEREKOU GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO
SURVIVE INTERNAL STRAINS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE MILITIA MIGHT
SOON BECOME SUFFICIENTLY POWERFUL TO MOVE BENIN CLOSER TO
PRESIDENT KEREKOU'S VISION OF A MINIATURE CUBA ON THE
WEST AFRICAN COAST. THOMPSON

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